




# *Guide*

# *for Effective Paraeducator Practices in Iowa*



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**paraeducator** /par'e e-je'-ka-ter/ n: An employee who works under the supervision of teachers or other licensed personnel who have the ultimate responsibility for the design and implementation of education and related service programs. An employee whose position is either instructional in nature or who delivers other direct or indirect services to children, youth and/or their parents.  
*Syn., paraprofessional, educational aide, instructional aide.*

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*Iowa Department of Education  
Division of Early Childhood, Elementary and  
Secondary Education*

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## *Beliefs*

The value of paraeducators and the complexity of their roles are recognized as important to the success of the school.

Paraeducators are respected and valued members of the educational team.

Paraeducators are critical to the social, emotional, academic, and vocational success of children and youth.

Paraeducators play an active and essential role in their work with children and youth by providing encouragement, support, assistance, and advocacy.

Communication among paraeducators, licensed personnel, and parents is carefully planned and carried out.

Paraeducators understand the needs of children and youth and have the specialized training to meet student needs.

All paraeducators are provided with training prior to initiating services and ongoing staff development to keep updated on best practices and current, effective strategies.

Paraeducators have a professional identity and advocate for their profession by maintaining positive, supportive, cooperative, and professional relationships.

Teachers, administrators and other members of the educational team enable paraeducators to be effective in their work by providing resources, support, feedback, and assistance.

Leaders at the state, regional, district, and building level provide the systems level support and resources to enable paraeducators to be effective in their work.

# Guide For Effective Paraeducator Practices in Iowa

## Introduction

### What Is The Purpose Of This Guide?

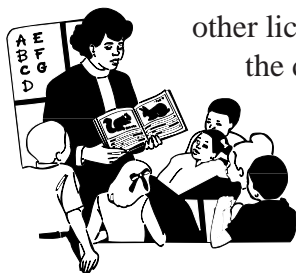
This guide describes the services that are necessary to support effective paraeducator services in accredited Iowa schools. It is intended to assist schools in improving services to children as well as complying with rules and regulations. Refining practices to maximize the effectiveness of paraeducators will ideally result in better teaming, improved instruction and support to children and youth, greater resources for teachers, and ultimately improved student achievement.

*Encourage  
dialogue among  
teachers,  
paraeducators,  
and others*

The guidelines offered in this document are intended to serve as a prototype for local adoption and as a framework for dialogue. Local education agencies (LEAs) and area education agencies (AEAs) are encouraged to provide paraeducators, teachers, administrators, parents, and children and youth with opportunities for dialogue about guidelines for effective paraeducator services. The guidelines may be modified with local input to reflect the priorities and values of the agency and may be formally adopted as LEA or AEA statements of effective practice for service.

### What Is A Paraeducator?

Paraeducators are essential members of the educational team serving Iowa's children and youth. They work under the supervision of teachers or other licensed personnel who have the ultimate responsibility for the design and implementation of education and related service programs. They provide assistance to a variety



of children and youth including those with and without disabilities, those with health needs, those with limited English and others. (See Appendix G for examples of paraeducator duties.) Paraeducators work in a range of educational settings including the general education classroom, special education settings, lunchrooms, playgrounds, school buses, vocational work sites, computer labs, and school media centers. They are employed in early childhood, elementary, middle school, secondary school programs and residential educational facilities. They provide a resource that contributes significantly to the success of individual children and youth, schools, and educational programs. There are over 5,000 paraeducators working in schools and other educational settings in Iowa. Nationwide there are approximately half a million paraeducators serving in educational roles.

*Over 5,000  
paraeducators  
in Iowa*

Among the titles used to describe paraeducators in educational settings are such terms as: paraprofessional, educational aide, instructional aide, teacher associ-

ate, native language tutor, media associate, clerk, health paraprofessional, office interventionist, and library assistant. In today's schools individuals filling these positions are technicians who might be more aptly described as *paraeducators* just as their counterparts in law and medicine are designated paralegals and paramedics. (For more information about paraeducators, see the Paraeducator Fact Sheet in the section entitled *Handouts*.)

Definitions addressing specific special education assignments are given in *Iowa Statutes and Rules Related to the Employment and Training of Paraprofessionals in Educational Settings* (Appendix E).

Although this document focuses on the roles of paraeducators and it advocates for effective paraeducator services, there is no intent to suggest that paraeducators are any more important than individuals in other roles and assignments. The guidelines described in this document could be adapted for other nonlicensed personnel in schools.

*Variety of  
constituents  
contributed*

### Who Developed The Guide?

This document has been developed with input from a variety of constituents from local education agencies, area education agencies, community colleges and the Department of Education. The constituents included paraeducators, teachers, parents, and administrators. (See Appendix C.) Portions of the materials are based on the ongoing work of stakeholders who began meeting in February of 1996. Other groups that have shared ideas and suggestions for improving services of paraeducators include:

- Parent-Educator Connection
- Directors of Special Education, Area Education Agencies
- Urban Education Network
- Iowa Behavioral Initiative Specialized Instructional Services Network
- Iowa Department of Education Staff

*Adopt district  
guidelines for  
effective  
paraeducator  
services*

The Iowa Learning Resource Network (I-LRN), a program funded by the Iowa Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education, facilitated discussions, gathered ideas, developed draft language and, with input, revised the publication.

### How Should The Guide Be Used?

This guide is meant to serve as a resource for local and area education agency personnel, parents, community colleges, colleges, and universities. Potential uses include:

- A reference for requirements established by state and federal rules and regulations.

- A tool to assist local district personnel in developing and adopting local district guidelines for effective paraeducator practices.
- A resource for reviewing district policies and practices, for planning paraeducator staff development, and for considering resource allocation.
- A resource for the design of training for teachers and school administrators.
- A resource to enhance communication among parents, paraeducators, and teachers.

### **What Can Principals And District Administrators Do To Implement The *Guide For Effective Paraeducator Practices In Iowa*?**

*Administrators play a critical role*

School administrators play a critical role in supervising and supporting the work of paraeducators. School principals and district administrators may use this guide as a tool for developing appropriate paraeducator services in their buildings or local districts. Suggested steps for using the *Guide for Effective Paraeducator Practices in Iowa* follow.

- 1) Review the contents of the guide.
- 2) Study the requirements for paraeducator services. See the following chapters:
  - a) *Rules and Regulations: What Are The Federal And State Requirements Regarding Paraeducator Services?*
  - b) *The IEP: What Are The Considerations For Implementing Paraprofessional Services In Special Education?*
  - c) *Appendix B: Statutes And Rules Related To The Employment And Training Of Paraprofessionals In Educational Settings*
- 3) Form a building or district level committee with paraeducators, teachers, other building personnel and parents to:
  - a) develop beliefs and a vision for paraeducator services. (See Appendix A.)
  - b) review chapter entitled *Suggested Guidelines For Implementation Of Effective Paraeducator Services In Educational Settings*.
  - c) develop proposed building or district level guidelines for effective practice.
  - d) finalize and approve guidelines for effective practice.

- 4) Work with building or district level committee to review building or district-level policies and practices in order to identify those that do and those that do not support the implementation of these guidelines. Make recommendations for alternative policies and practices.
- 5) Revise policies and practices to comply with rules and regulations and recommendations for effective practice.
- 6) Develop and use a checklist for reviewing building or district practices. (See section entitled *Handouts* for the Suggested Checklist for Principals.)

## Resources For Principals And District Administrators

Long, Carol A. *Piecing together the paraprofessional puzzle: A handbook for the orientation and training of first year paraprofessionals*. 1996. Wisconsin Edition by Anne Rodgers-Rhyme. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Madison, WI.

Pickett, Anna Lou and H. Gerlach. *Supervising paraeducators in school settings: A team approach*. 1997. Pro-ed. Austin TX.

Pickett, Anna Lou. *Improving the performance of paraeducators in the workforce. A technical assistance manual for administrators and staff developers*. 1993. The National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services. Center for Advanced Study in Education, Graduate School and University Center. City University of New York, New York, NY.

To preview these materials contact:

Deb Hansen  
Resource Center for Issues in Special Education  
Drake University  
2507 University Avenue  
Des Moines, Iowa 50311-4505  
Phone: 515-271-4164      Fax: 515-271-4185  
E-mail: deb.hansen@drake.edu

Area Education Agencies (AEAs) have many resources available to principals. Each AEA has a contact person who can provide information about AEA resources that pertain to paraeducator issues.

# Rules and Regulations

## What Are The Federal And State Requirements Regarding Paraeducator Services?

A variety of federal and state rules and regulations for AEAs and LEAs address paraeducator positions and staff development. Appendix B provides specific rule language pertaining to paraeducator services in Iowa.

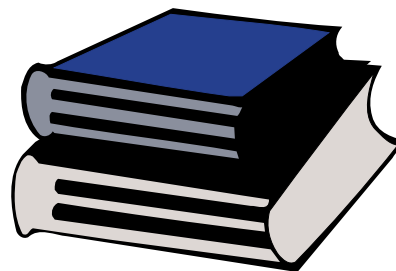
**Authorizing and Defining Positions:** The Iowa Administrative Code (IAC) authorizes the employment of and defines the following positions: paraprofessionals (281–41.10(256B) IAC); other special education assistants (281–41.10(2) IAC); educational aides (281–12.4(9) IAC); and Title I instructional aides (Sec. 1119 Professional Development Title I Handbook (20 USC 6320)).

*Iowa  
Administrative  
Code*

**Inservice Training Program for Newly Hired Paraeducators:** Additional regulations describe requirements for training paraeducators. Iowa Administrative Code 281–12.4(9) requires that newly hired paraeducators [educational aides] must complete an inservice training program during their first year of employment.

**Three-Year Staff Development Plan with Annual Objectives and Strategies:** Each local district is required to have a staff development plan for school personnel including paraeducators [educational aides]. This plan must include general goals for a three-year period and specific objectives and strategies for the current year (281–12.7(1) IAC). School boards are required to annually budget specified funds to support the staff development plan.

**Special Education Requirements:** Iowa's *Administrative Rules of Special Education* has language that mandates that paraeducators complete preservice and continuing education specific to the functions to be performed. This rule specifies that appropriate training must be completed prior to the beginning of service wherever practicable and within a reasonable time of the beginning of service where the pre-entry completion is not practicable. The rules also require that AEAs have Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) plans to describe procedures and activities to ensure an adequate supply of personnel. Paraeducators are to be provided with continuing education to enable them to meet the needs of children and youth with disabilities who are eligible for services.



*Administrative  
Rules of Special  
Education*

**Title I Requirements:** Federal Title I rules require that each local district receiving Title I funds shall include paraeducators [instructional aides] in

professional development. The rules also create an option for establishing a career ladder program for paraeducators (Sec. 1119 Professional Development Title I Handbook (E-133)).

*Title I*

**Staff Development Requirements for All Personnel:** The Iowa Administrative Code stipulates training for all school personnel in the following areas:

- hazardous chemicals (347–120.6 IAC Section 89B.10)
- multicultural non-sexist approaches to education programs (281–12.5 (8))
- technology (281–12.5 (10))
- school personnel who serve at-risk children and youth receive inservice training (281–12.5(13)).

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 1997:** The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 is a federal law which requires each state to have in effect a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development that is designed to ensure an adequate supply of qualified special education, general education, and related services personnel, including paraprofessionals. State education agencies are required to establish and maintain personnel standards to ensure personnel are appropriately and adequately prepared and trained. These standards are to be consistent with state laws, regulations, and policies. Rule language has been added that allows paraprofessionals who are appropriately trained to assist in the provision of special education.

*IDEA of 1997*

## Suggested Guidelines For The Implementation Of Effective Paraeducator Services In Educational Settings\*

This section contains recommended guidelines for making paraeducator services more effective. It is intended to facilitate decision-making by various readers. The guidelines may be considered a tool to assist in developing and adopting standards for effective paraeducator practices. The guidelines are based on the spirit and convictions expressed in the beliefs and vision statements which were developed with input from a variety of constituents. (See Appendix A for a complete list of the belief and vision statements and Appendix C for a list of the individuals who contributed to their development.)

### **Guideline 1: The Paraeducator And The Instructional Team**

Paraeducators are respected and supported as team members responsible for assisting licensed staff in the delivery of instruction, support, and related services.

#### *Examples of Implementation*

- A. In selecting and designing instructional programs, the roles of participating licensed staff and paraeducators are an important consideration in program planning.
- B. In designing instructional programs, district personnel have defined the roles of participating licensed staff as the instructional leaders and paraeducators as the assisting personnel.
- C. Communication among licensed staff, paraeducators, and parents is planned and carried out.
- D. Parents are well informed about the role of the paraeducator in the implementation of their child's program.
- E. Common planning time is provided for team members, including paraeducators.
- F. School district (or AEA) newsletters, staff development activities, and other communications include information for and about

\*The draft guidelines from the states of Utah and Washington were used as prototypes for designing the Iowa guidelines.

paraeducators. All such district communications are distributed to paraeducators.

## **Guideline 2: Role Clarification**

The entire instructional team participates within clearly defined roles to provide an appropriate educational program for children and youth.

### *Examples of Implementation*

- A. A written, up-to-date job description for each paraeducator is provided to the paraeducator and designated supervisor of the paraeducator. Job descriptions specifically define job expectations and serve as a basis for evaluation.
- B. The role of the supervisor is clearly defined.
- C. Paraeducators are regularly involved in planning but are not responsible for planning the instructional program for children and youth.
- D. Paraeducators are not required to assume responsibilities assigned to licensed staff, such as developing IEP goals, creating lesson plans, formally evaluating children and youth, modifying lesson plans without supervision. Paraeducators should not be assigned to serve as a substitute teacher unless the paraeducator holds the appropriate teaching license and endorsement or a substitute teaching license. The conditions of employment must provide for the paraeducator to work as a substitute teacher.
- E. Clearly written procedures for routine and emergency tasks for paraeducators and licensed staff members are in place.

## **Guideline 3: Supervision**

Paraeducators receive appropriate supervision to ensure the delivery of effective educational services to children and youth.

### *Examples of Implementation*

- A. Paraeducators are supervised by a designated, licensed staff member, according to state rules and regulations.
- B. Procedures are in place for structured, systematic management, supervision, and evaluation of paraeducators.
- C. Supervision supports the professional growth of the paraeducator and

includes opportunity for self-evaluation and input by the paraeducator.

#### **Guideline 4: Staff Development Of Paraeducators**

To ensure quality education for children and youth and appropriate safety for children, youth, and staff, paraeducators are provided with an agency orientation and ongoing staff development commensurate with their responsibilities. Suggested competencies are listed in Appendix D.

##### *Examples of Implementation*

- A. Paraeducators receive inservice training during the initial year of employment. (See related Iowa Code 281.12.7(1) in appendix entitled *Statutes And Rules Related To The Employment And Training Of Paraprofessionals In Educational Settings*.)
- B. Paraeducators receive training in core areas relating to their responsibilities as well as areas specific to their job assignments. This training may be provided by the district, AEA, community college, university, or other appropriate agency. Suggested competencies are listed in Appendix D.
- C. Paraeducators are included in district/AEA staff development programs.
- D. Paraeducators are trained with licensed staff whenever possible to provide common understanding and effective teamwork.
- E. Training needs are assessed periodically.
- F. A written plan for staff development is in place. (See related Iowa Code 281.12.4(9) in Appendix B.)

#### **Guideline 5: Staff Development Of Licensed Staff In Supervisory Roles**

Licensed staff are sufficiently trained in supervisory skills to work with paraeducators.

##### *Examples of Implementation*

- A. Licensed staff members receive staff development in the supervision of paraeducators prior to being assigned to direct, support, or supervise a paraeducator.

- B. Suggested training areas for teachers and administrators meet the supervisory needs of their roles. (See Appendix E.)
- C. Licensed staff receive the same content training as the paraeducators with whom they work, ideally at the same time.

### **Guideline 6: Administrator Support**

Administrators provide support for effective paraeducator services.

#### *Examples of Implementation*

- A. Administrators are well informed about how appropriate paraeducator services should be implemented and what situations require the assignment of a paraeducator.
- B. Administrators inform the school board of the changing roles and responsibilities of paraeducators.
- C. Administrators assume an active and substantive role in overseeing the participation of paraeducators in effective instructional programs.
- D. Administrators provide leadership to the teaming process which enables paraeducators to be partners in planning and delivering services.
- E. Administrators create a work schedule which provides time for regular, organized and systematic communication among the paraeducators and other members of the instructional team.
- F. Time, funding, and other resources are provided to enable paraeducators to participate in staff development, meetings, and other opportunities for communication.

### **Guideline 7: Ethical Responsibilities**

Paraeducators and licensed staff consistently practice ethical behaviors required of their position.

#### *Examples of Implementation*

- A. See *Suggested Code of Ethics* in Appendix F.
- B. Adopt code of ethics for the local district or building

## Guideline 8: Policies And Procedures

Policies and procedures recognize and support paraeducators as integral partners in providing educational services.

### *Examples of Implementation*

- A. Policies and procedures are adopted and implemented by a variety of constituents including paraeducators, parents, teachers, administrators, children and youth, and community members.
- B. Policies and procedures recognize the strengths and needs of paraeducators within the service delivery context.
- C. Policy-makers regularly review the implementation of policies and guidelines and make recommendations for change as appropriate.

## Guideline 9: Career Opportunities And Compensation

Paraeducators are provided with opportunities for advancement and adequate compensation.

### *Examples of Implementation*

- A. Paraeducators are provided with pay commensurate with responsibilities, experience, and training.
- B. Opportunities for career development and advancement are available and accessible.



# *Handouts*

## *Guide for Effective Paraeducator Practices in Iowa*

*Iowa Department of Education  
Division of Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education*

## Paraeducator Fact Sheet

### What do paraeducators do?

Paraeducators participate in many phases of the instructional process. Under the supervision of licensed teachers and other licensed personnel, paraeducators serve in a wide variety of roles. Examples of the work performed by paraeducators include:

- 1) assisting with functional assessment activities;
- 2) observing and recording information about student performance and behavior;
- 3) assisting with instruction provided to individual and small groups of children and youth;
- 4) providing opportunities for children and youth to practice skills in the classroom and community settings; and
- 5) assisting with the implementation of behavior management programs for individual children and youth.

Paraeducators provide assistance to a variety of children and youth including those with and without disabilities, those with health needs, those with limited English and others. Paraeducators work in a range of educational settings including the general education classroom, special education settings, lunchrooms, playgrounds, school buses, vocational work sites, computer labs, school media centers. Paraeducators are employed in early childhood, elementary, middle school, and secondary school programs and residential educational facilities.

Participants in focus groups for the Paraprofessional Needs Assessment Project (Hansen, 1995) reported that paraeducators in Iowa often perform many different functions and that individual paraeducators have multiple roles. Some paraeducators described their jobs as clearly defined in written job descriptions. Many respondents, however, reported that it is common for paraeducators to have only vague or generic job descriptions or no job description at all. Many paraeducators reported that they find working with children to be fulfilling and that they enjoy their jobs. Administrators and teachers who participated in focus groups indicated that paraeducators are important to the children and youth, programs, and schools they serve.

### Why address paraeducator services?

At the state, AEA, LEA, and building levels, efforts are under way to improve

the quality of education by implementing a variety of innovations and reforms. Teachers are required to perform increasingly complex roles and are expected to be extensively involved in school improvement efforts aimed at increasing student achievement. An essential resource that enables teachers to successfully take on these complex functions and additional roles is the service of paraeducators. As teachers assume more responsibility and accountability for improving student progress and the quality of education, their roles are being redefined. Anna Lou Pickett, of the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services, Center for Advanced Study in Education at the Graduate School and University Center, City University of New York, describes the roles of teachers in a changing work place (1994):

In today's classrooms, teachers are supervisors of human resources and program managers. The term "classroom teacher" no longer adequately defines or embodies the expanding responsibilities teachers have in education. Analysis of the daily function of teachers finds that major portions of their time are spent in consultation with colleagues, program planning and administrative tasks. In addition to these programmatic duties, their responsibilities now include supervising and coordinating the work of paraprofessionals and other support personnel. They—

- 1) set goals and plan for paraeducators and other adults in the program;
- 2) schedule and assign duties to paraeducators;
- 3) direct and monitor the day-to-day work of paraeducators;
- 4) provide feedback about paraeducators' on-the-job performance; and
- 5) provide on-the-job coaching for paraeducators.

Data indicate that the numbers of paraeducators in Iowa's schools are increasing. While there is not specific evidence to suggest why paraeducators are being employed in greater numbers, there are several factors that may contribute to the rising numbers of paraeducators. These factors include (Pickett, 1996):

- Federal and state legislation requiring schools to provide free appropriate public education to all children and youth without regard to the cause or severity of the disability
- Increased demands for supportive services for expanding numbers of economically and other disadvantaged children and youth who are considered at risk
- Efforts to effectively integrate children and youth with disabilities into general education

- Increasing numbers of children and youth with limited English proficiency

As the population in Iowa becomes more diverse, more children are requiring individualized instruction and assistance from school personnel. With the evolving roles of teachers and other licensed staff, the utilization of paraeducator services has changed significantly. The number of paraeducators working in educational assignments in Iowa is increasing dramatically, according to several sources of data:

*The Annual Condition of Education Report (1997)*

State Total of FTE Instructional Aides 1996-1997 .....	5,847.1
State Total of FTE Instructional Aides 1985-1986 .....	2,668.6
<b>119.1% change in FTE Aides 1985-86 to 1996-97</b>	

*Local Education Agency Certified Annual Report, Special Education Supplement*

A self-report of number of paraeducators (*not FTEs*) employed during school year (does not include AEAs that participate in pooling).

State Total Special Education Paraprofessionals 1996-1997 .....	4,352.0
State Total Special Education Paraprofessionals 1985-1986 .....	1,686.0
<b>158% change in the number of Paraprofessionals 1985-86 to 1996-97</b>	

*Title I Educational Associates*

State Total FTE Educational Associates 1996-1997 .....	156.0
State Total FTE Educational Associates 1988-1989 .....	87.2
<b>79% change in FTE Title I Associates 1988-89 to 1996-97</b>	

With the number of paraeducators increasing, another area of concern is the effectiveness of services provided by paraeducators. Findings from a series of focus groups suggest important issues need to be considered regarding the effective delivery of paraeducator services. The following themes from the focus group findings suggest areas which warrant examination (Hansen, 1995).

## Themes from focus group findings

- *Inclusion of children and youth with disabilities has changed the roles of paraeducators.*
- *Paraeducators need training in:*
  - behavior management
  - confidentiality
  - IEP issues
    - disabilities and needs of children and youth
    - accommodations
    - teaming
    - inclusion
- *Respondents report a lack of:*
  - adequate compensation and recognition
  - adequate supervision
  - clearly defined job descriptions
  - information about IEPs and student needs
  - opportunities to plan and to discuss children and youth
- *Teachers who work with paraeducators want training in:*
  - supervision
  - communication
  - time management
  - working with experienced paraeducators
- *Parents are concerned about situations in which:*
  - paraeducators make decisions and provide services to their child with little supervision
  - paraeducators are not adequately trained
  - the roles of paraeducators are not clear
  - paraeducators lack information on their child's IEP and needs
  - paraeducators are not part of a team
  - paraeducators give their child too much help, a factor which can stigmatize the child in the general education classroom

## Suggested Checklist for Principals

School principals play a critical role in supervising and supporting the work of paraeducators. The school principal may use this checklist as a tool for developing appropriate paraeducator services in his or her building.

Consider forming a building or district level committee of administrators, paraeducators, teachers, other building personnel and parents to examine building practices and plan strategies for improving paraeducator services. The committee could use the items on the checklist below or develop a checklist specifically for its school.

**Yes**   **No**

- |                          |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does our building have guidelines for effective paraeducator services and a code of ethics? Are team members informed about these guidelines and their ethical responsibilities?                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does each paraeducator in the building have a clearly defined role? Has this role been communicated to each team member?   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does each paraeducator in the building have a current and accurate job description?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do teachers understand their responsibilities for directing the paraeducator(s), giving feedback to the paraeducator, training the paraeducator, scheduling, providing input to personnel evaluations, etc.? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do paraeducators know who can provide help and support?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are the responsibilities for supervising the paraeducator(s) clearly defined? Do team members know who is supposed to supervise them and do they understand the role of the supervisor?                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do paraeducators and teachers understand the district evaluation process?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is there a process for overseeing the team process to ensure that effective practices are being followed?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is there a process for keeping parents informed about the roles assigned to paraeducators?   |

Yes	No	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are school newspapers and other correspondence delivered to each paraeducator? Is information about the work of paraeducators included in newsletters?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does each paraeducator have the skills needed to meet assignments?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does our building have a written staff development plan for paraeducators?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Has each newly hired paraeducator received the required inservice training during his or her first year?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does our building have a written staff development plan for paraeducators?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are the staff development needs of paraeducators assessed?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are paraeducators provided with staff development in basic competencies that most paraeducators need?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are paraeducators provided with staff development in areas that are specific to their individual assignments?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do teachers have the skills they need to direct and support paraeducators? If not, are there staff development efforts planned to meet this need?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is there time built into the schedule for paraeducators to meet with teachers to plan, maintain effective communication, and receive feedback?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are there written procedures for emergencies? Have staff members been trained in how to respond to emergencies?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do the paraeducators in our building receive recognition and adequate compensation for the work they do?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is there anything our faculty can do to assist paraeducators who have a goal to become a teacher or to pursue some other career?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are paraeducators provided with opportunities to get involved with building and district activities where their input would be valued?

# ***A family guide to paraeducator services***

## **Family Involvement in Planning Paraeducator Services to Implement the Individualized Education Program (IEP)**

**What is the role of the family in considering the need for paraeducator services?**

Family members should be active participants in considering the need for paraeducator (paraprofessional) services in an individualized education program (IEP). If a student requires the services of a paraeducator to assist with the implementation of the IEP, family members need to contribute to the decision making and planning about how those services will be delivered. The following questions are intended to assist the family and other IEP team members in discussing paraeducator services.

**What issues do family members and other IEP team members need to address when considering the needs of the student?**

*What accommodations or modifications are needed and who will deliver those accommodations?*

The IEP team should specifically describe the modifications and accommodations the student needs to be successful in meeting the goals and objectives of the IEP. Once the accommodations and modifications are designed, some decisions must be made about who will work with the student to implement them. In some situations the teacher or teachers will implement the goals, objectives, accommodations and modifications. In other situations additional support may be needed. As team members plan for meeting the needs of individual students and the overall needs of the classroom program, they should consider all possible options for using available resources. The use of paraeducator services may or may not be the most appropriate option for meeting the needs of the student. (It is not the intent of this paper to suggest that paraeducators should be used in place of teachers or that volunteers be used in the place of trained paraeducators.) Possible alternatives to assigning a paraeducator include:

- using peer tutoring or cooperative learning practices.
- reassigning existing paraeducators to help the student.
- increasing training to existing staff in making accommodations.
- assigning a paraeducator for a brief time for initial transition into a new setting.
- utilizing volunteers and foster grandparents.
- using assistive technology to assist the student with taking notes.
- team teaching with the paraeducator alternating between two classrooms.

The IEP team may determine that paraeducator services are needed. It is not the role of the team members to assign an individual person to perform the identified services. That responsibility typically belongs to the building principal.

Once the decision to assign paraeducator services is made, several issues should be considered. The following information can serve as a guide to examining those issues.

**If paraeducator services are determined to be the appropriate service delivery model, what questions need to be asked?**

*What services will be provided by the paraeducator?* The IEP should include a specific description of the services the paraeducator will be expected to provide.

*Where will the services be provided?* The IEP should describe the educational setting in which the student will be working with the paraeducator. For example, whether the student will work with the paraeducator in the general education or the special education setting should be discussed and documented within the IEP.

*How much time will the paraeducator be working with the child?* The IEP should specify the approximate schedule for when the paraeducator will be assisting with IEP objectives.

*How long will the services be needed?* Paraeducator service may be discontinued when specific skills are accomplished, when levels of independence have been achieved, or when specific conditions are met.

*Who will provide the services?* The IEP should list the position of the person responsible. The name of the paraeducator should not be listed. Questions about substitutes or coverage in the event that the paraeducator is absent may need to be addressed for some students.

*How will we know when the student will be able to be successful without paraeducator services?* The IEP should list the level of independence or skill acquisition that will indicate the need to revise the level of support and the type of modification and services needed. Discussion at the IEP meeting might address these questions: What skills need to be accomplished before the student is able to be successful without the supports of the paraeducator? How will we know when the student has attained mastery of these skills?

**Questions the family may direct to the building administrator.**

*Who has the responsibility for observing and evaluating whether the paraeducator is working effectively with my child?*

*To whom do we take concerns about paraeducator services?*

*What skills does the paraeducator need to work effectively with my child on IEP objectives? How will the paraeducator be trained prior to starting services? Who is going to train the paraeducator? What ongoing staff development will be provided to the paraeducator?*

**Questions for the family to consider to ensure effective communication throughout the school year.**

*Who should I call to discuss routine issues such as day-to-day care or ordinary events that arise?*

*Who should I call about programming issues such as my child's progress, class scheduling, instructional needs, or social interaction with peers?*

*How will information the paraeducator has about my child's experiences at school be shared with me?*